

Planning for a new, future local jail should not hold up investing in public health and restorative justice now.

Community leaders are at work reforming our criminal justice system, including replacing our 40-year-old jail. The incarcerated population often exceeds the building capacity and the cap of 278 inmates that the County set with the ACLU. The Monroe County Commissioners and Council plan to invest Economic Development Local Income Tax (ED-LIT) funding to purchase land for a new facility.

But building a new facility will take several years and there are immediate, urgent needs. We should not wait to improve mental health and substance use disorder services both for those incarcerated and those we want to help avoid incarceration.

The United States jails more people than any place in the world. Two million people languish in our prisons and jails with some people disproportionately represented, including people from poverty, people of color, and people struggling with trauma or mental health or substance use disorders.

We in Indiana incarcerate people at a higher rate than the national average. For every 100,000 Hoosiers, 765 are locked up in prisons, jails, immigration detention, or juvenile justice facilities. Every month, about 300 people are booked into the Monroe County Jail. Many have been booked previously and need treatment, intervention, support, or other forms of deferral. Americans should not accept this. Hoosiers should not accept this. We can certainly do better in Monroe County.

Challenges in the current jail include space, layout, conditions, and areas to provide services - particularly for substance use and mental health. But fundamentally, these are public health issues, not only, or even mostly, jail issues. Community criminal justice system reform must address them, and also recidivism rates, prevention and intervention efforts, and structural racism, which cannot be viewed independently from one another. Our County and City leadership, including the Board of Judges, work together on measures that address some, but not all, needs.

Resources are available right now. Our county still has a great deal of the \$29 million we received in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and we'll be receiving a new \$10 million per year ED-LIT funds. Both the City and County will be receiving opioid settlement funds to combat substance use disorder, and this presents an obvious partnership opportunity. The City, which is home to more than half of the County's residents, is eager to collaborate on this difficult and

important work and looks to the County, responsible for public health and justice, for leadership in new investments that bring crucial reform now.

Neither mental illness nor substance use disorders are crimes, yet those experiencing either or both are disproportionately represented among people incarcerated in Monroe County. Many people booked into our jail have no permanent address, which is also not a crime. It is true that some people struggling with one or more of these conditions may commit crimes that run the gamut from petty to violent. It is also well established that incarceration alone does not address the issues that led to criminal activity. These public health challenges should be addressed with appropriate programming, which would ultimately serve the whole community.

Recently commissioned reports (<https://bton.in/DExfV>, <https://bton.in/T-fh0>) outline outdated design challenges, chronic over-capacity, inadequate staffing, repeat recidivism, high rates of addiction and mental health issues, and lack of room to expand. These are all interconnected challenges that will not simply be solved with a new building. They are also problems that cannot wait to be solved while we discuss a new building. Let's address these justice and public health issues now with adequate funding, innovative thinking, City and County cooperation, and community support.

Deputy Mayor Don Griffin, Jr.

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